

Ex-Agent Rebutts Ray Lawyer on FBI Role

By JIM DYKES

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A retired FBI agent who served in several Southern offices during the years when Civil Rights activity was at its height, has taken sharp issue with Mark Lane, attorney for James Earl Ray.

Mr. Lane, in a recent UT ISSUES lecture, said the prime suspect in the murder of Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. should be the FBI, not Ray.

Robert T. (Bob) Moran, now living in Gatlinburg, was an agent in the Savannah, Ga.; Charleston, S.C.; Birmingham, Ala.; Gadsden and Decatur, Ala., offices before coming to the Jackson, Tenn., office in 1967. He was in the Birmingham office from 1963 to 1967.

The gist of his reply to Mr. Lane's charges is, "Put up or shut up!"

He said the statement is "reckless," made without any proof or foundation.

HE ASKED, rhetorically, "What will he do? Write a book?"

Mr. Lane is the author of "Rush to Judgment," a condemnation of the Warren Commission's report on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Mr. Moran pointed out Mr. Lane's track record on the Kennedy assassination: Mr. Lane said in 1967 that New Orleans Dist. Atty. Jim (Big Jim) Garrison would "rock the nation" when he unrolled his Kennedy assassination conspiracy case in a court trial.

Mr. Lane said Mr. Garrison would

prove Lee Harvey Oswald was not the man who shot the President.

He said, "Mr. Garrison knows who killed President Kennedy, he knows who organized the plot . . . he knows what forces are involved. And I know he knows."

Mr. Lane, a lawyer as well as an author, said the Garrison case, establishing a conspiracy in the President's death, "is one of the most solid cases I've ever heard detailed."

THE GARRISON CASE featured a group of fringe people and never did come to anything. Mr. Garrison was indicted by a Federal grand jury in 1971 on charges of taking bribes from gamblers. When a jury freed him, after 15 hours deliberation, he dropped from sight until recently, when he finished first in a primary for an appellate judgeship.

Mr. Moran notes that Mr. Lane "didn't come through" on the Garrison claims and predicts the "Raoul picture," allegedly identified by James Earl Ray, also will fizzle out.

Ray claims he was set up by a mysterious adventurer named Raoul to take the blame for the King murder. Mr. Lane said Ray has identified a picture of Raoul, but he refused to say who showed Ray the picture or where it came from. He said Ray thinks the "appropriate place" to talk about the picture is the courtroom.

Mr. Moran said, "The more times Ray is brought back and forth from the prison to the courtroom, the more opportunities he would have to escape. The odds aren't good, but there's always hope for him. He was in escape status when Dr. King was murdered, and, seems that I read where he also escaped from Brushy Mountain not too long ago."

HE WAS TRANSFERRED from Birmingham to the Memphis District in 1967.

"I was in the Memphis District when Dr. King was assassinated," Mr. Moran said. While in both districts, I had occasion to work on . . . cases involving Civil Rights violations, affording me a good working knowledge of the FBI's cases in the field. I also had daily contact with agents working this same field, and let me assure you that no one in the FBI was responsible for Dr. King's death. I cannot think of any reason why anyone in the bureau would have gained anything by his death."

He said most agents always were concerned for the safety of such prominent persons, although the FBI was not responsible for their safety — meaning the job of an FBI agent is investigative, not protective.

He said the FBI worked long, hard hours on the case and, after a long search, found Ray and had him brought back.

He said Ray pleaded guilty with

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representation by top-flight counsel.

"He had his day in court. It was a well investigated case at every turn."

HE SAID Ray "is probably not the brightest criminal in the world, but he had been in and out of enough jails and prisons and was too experienced to enter a guilty plea to a crime he didn't commit — particularly murder. Even with the worst attorney in the world, or no attorney, he still would know better. He probably pleaded guilty to avoid trial by jury and a possible death sentence."

He said Mr. Lane's actions appear to be publicity-seeking at the expense of the FBI.

"Lane's remarks were an outright insult to FBI personnel, past and present," he said. "If someone made such slanderous remarks about Mr. Lane, without any foundation, they would be sued and they and our Government would have to fork over a large bundle of cash. It is a rather sad commentary when a citizen can stand up in public and make accusations without proof and has all the protection the law can afford, while on the other hand the FBI has to stand by and take whatever is dished out and said about them."